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ABSTRACT

A study was made of differential perception and definition of race in the distinct cultures of Brazil, the U.S.A., and the North American Indian; and in two subcultural regions: the Intermountain West and the Pacific Coast. The data, except for Brazil, were gathered in a university context. The Brazil sample was 118; U.S.A, 136; and, for the North American Indian, 49. One instrument used to measure Interracial Sensitivity was of the projective, Thematic Apperception Test design. The other instrument measured Racial Definition. To prevent sensitizing the subject, the second instrument was always given after the first. There was no measurable difference found in both the perception and definition of race in different cultures and subcultures. Racial sensitivity was found to be not scalable. There were no significant effects associated with urbanization which had been thought to sharpen racial sensitivity and consciousness. This study suggests the emergence of some socially significant new trends in patterns of racial response. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (JM)

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# CROSS-CULTURAL PERCEPTION OF RACE

John S. Staley*

The research project reported here grew out of work done in Brazil on interracial marriage. A land of contrasts, Brazil houses many subcultures. A number of studies have pointed up the different definition and perception of race in the several regions having markedly different characteristics in population density, urbanization, industrialization, and density of immigration. Fryre,[1] Park[2], Pierson[3], Wagley[4], Azevedos[5], and Staley[6] have indicated the rich vocabulary of race with endearing words like "meu negro," flattering terms like "moreno," color-blind expressions like "Branco de Bahia": the "white of Salvador" that are not so white by the standards of a Paulista or a citizen of the southern town of Florianopolis where many blacks speak German.

The Brazilian diversity in perceiving and defining race finds its counterpart in the variation of legal definitions employed in the various state statutes in North America. Definitions range from "one drop of blood", one-sixteenth, one-eighth, one-quarter, to one-half.[7] Social definitions basically follow a phenotypic characterization that permits considerable passing each Year.[8]

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The present paper attempts to measure differential perception and definition of race in three different cultures (Brazilian, United States, and American Indian), and in two subcultural regions (the Intermountain West and the Pacific Coast). Data is being gathered on the Chinese (Formosans) and Iranians, but these will not be included in this report.

In the attempt to relate cultural background as a set of glasses through which reality is perceived and comes to be subjectively defined to the notion of race, the following hypotheses are formulated:

1. There is a measurable difference in both the perception and definition of race in different cultures and subcultures;

2. There are different levels of Interracial Sensitivity, and these levels can be scaled and measured;

3. That urbanization sharpens racial sensitivity and heightens racial consciousness;

Methodological Procedure

The data for the research, except for the Brazilian schedules, were gathered in a university context. The sample for Brazil was 118; the United States, 136; and for the North American Indian, 49. While acculturation may tend to flatten out differences between the second and third groups, the selection of freshmen students lessened this effect. On the other hand it permitted a design that controlled important variables of age, religion, educational level, and to narrow class variation. (Table 1)

The instrument developed to measure Interracial Sensitivity followed the design of the Thematic Apperception Test, which is a projective technique.[9] For it, ten photos were selected from the Machete morgue (Brazil's counterpart to Life magazine), reflecting the scaling assumptions contained in Bogardus'[10] Social Distance Scale and Myrdal's[11] Rank Order of Discrimination. Each photo contains an interracial component, but as one moves from

the first to the tenth, the relations between the races become more personal and more intimate. It begins with a school room containing children of white and black racial characteristics and moves gradually toward an interracial marriage. Without reference to the purpose of the study, the person interviewed was simply asked to tell what first came to his mind on viewing the picture. He was given one minute to express his musings. Only six of the items were considered scalable.[1/2]

The second instrument was the Racial Definition Test. Consisting of a color photograph of thirteen championship soccer players who scan the gamut of racial intermixture, this measuring device simply required the interviewee to indicate whether the individual player was Negro, mulatto, or white, the official census classification in Brazil. These choices were scored: Negro, 1; Mulatto, 2; and White, 3. Therefore, a higher score indicated less heighted recognition of racial difference, since it was administered to whites primarily.

To prevent sensitizing the subject, the second instrument was always administered after the Racial Sensitivity Test. On the form for recording, no clue was given on the intent of the study.

Findings

Directly counter to the findings of an earlier unpublished study made in 1960 where sharply different levels of racial perception and definition were indicated between North American and Brazilian people, all three hypotheses were rejected at the .05 level in a variance analysis.

Findings (continued)

The marked measurable difference in both the perception and definition of race that was highly expected did not appear, as Table 2 indicates.

The second hypothesis, that racial sensitivity can be scaled, was not supported by the data despite counter evidence for the I.R.S. instrument as it was used in the Brazilian study.[6] Even after four of the items had been removed to increase the scalability, the index fell below .34.

With the urban mean at a score of 24 and the rural mean of 23 for both the United States and North American Indian samples, the difference did not prove significant. Hypothesis three was not supported by the data. The Brazilian sample was from an urban population.

Discussion

This study opens the possibility that some socially significant new trends in patterns of racial response have occurred. Perhaps the social impact of the last decade on racial sensitivity and definition has been seriously felt, at least by the most responsive age group in the population--namely, that of freshmen college students.

There was some evidence of high racial value fluctuation in the patterns of response to the Racial Sensitivity Test. Not infrequently there was an early expected response and then an obvious sudden dawning of the interview intent, resulting in a withholding of sensitivity responses.

Also, the highly charged national opinion climate may have its residue of effect in responding to the instruments.

There was clear evidence of narrowing differences between urban and rural response, between cultural and subcultural groups, and between regions in the United States. This is not inconsistent with the blurring ofdifferences widely reported in urban-rural trend studies.

There is the possibility that the sample used may have seen regional and national differences blurred by the homogeneity of religious values touching racial issues which have been highly sensitized by national issues. If this is so, then it represents an interesting phenomenon for reassessing the weight of the religious factor in racial attitude shaping.

If the basic findings are firm, then serious attention of further studies in changing racial patterns of response is indicated, so that there may be an updating of community response to social reality.

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